

Global Connections

Web Conferencing Tools Help Educators Collaborate Anytime, Anywhere

Web conferencing tools help educators from around the world collaborate in real time. Teachers, school counselors, and administrators need only to put on their headsets, check the time zone, and log on to meet and learn from educators across the globe.

Once connected, a teacher in Australia can discuss lesson plans with a group of educators in England, a Canadian technology coordinator can share ideas with a counterpart in Mexico, and a U.S. principal can discuss tech standards with an administrator in Brazil. Web conferencing brings groups together as if they were sitting in the same room, having a good cup of coffee, and talking about common issues.

There are some obvious advantages to this type of collaboration. Districts can save on travel expenses, and participants can stay put, which reduces their impact on the environment. The technology is easy to use and cheaper than hosting a conference. The price can range from zero, using free Adobe software with limited bells and whistles that serves up to three people, to \$1,200 for a start-up bundle that allows conferencing for 100 people with numerous features.

To get started, look for Web conferencing applications on the market that share these attributes:

Real-time text messaging. Communicating inside a Web meeting or online classroom takes the form of a chat. More advanced applications can do voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) and video.

Resource sharing. Allows you to share your desktop screen, files, software application, music, video, flash movie,

whiteboard, survey, assessment, and many other forms of media, depending on the type of application.

Safety and security. Participants can have usernames and passwords to limit access to the session.

Presentation tools. Hosts can use PowerPoint and other familiar formats to present content.

Whiteboard. Participants can draw, point to, and type content on the whiteboard using a built-in tool set.

Adobe Connect

Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional, which comes with videoconferencing and VoIP, has some advanced features for secure, reliable, smooth, and comfortable conferencing.

Easy setup. Flash makes Adobe Connect Web conferencing sessions simple. You can set up a meeting or virtual classroom in a matter of seconds and begin connecting and collaborating with others immediately. Flash can be used across platforms without the need to download plugins.

Customized look. Hosts can set up a Flash meeting room months before a session is to take place and construct the room with scalable, fluid, and flexible content containers called pods. The custom layouts and pods can be organized in real time or weeks before the meeting and then reused.

Easy conversion. FlashPaper can convert commonly used file formats into SWF files, making content scalable. Adobe Presenter can take an existing PowerPoint presentation; add audio, quizzes, and surveys; and convert to a Flash format. Adobe Cap-

tivate allows you to take screenshots within a smooth video stream, including the narration, and then produce a dynamic simulation for everyone to view in real time. Premiere Pro and Premiere Elements are video production suites that can convert any existing video project into a Flash format for viewing in any Share pod within the Adobe Connect environment. And Acrobat 8 allows you to produce secure, dynamic PDF documents. All of these tools can produce content that you can load into pods.

Fast uploads. The Content Library quickly uploads files for other participants to see and experience during a conference.

Sharing. Application/document sharing allows participants to share files, applications, and documents during a conference.

Remote control. This feature allows any participant to practice a new application.

Real-time polling. The host can ask participants questions and broadcast the results to the conference group.

Reporting. The host can collect data on participants, save assessment scores, capture poll results, and record the number of slides viewed through Adobe Presenter.

Archiving. The host can record the conference and edit it for later viewing.

Adobe Education Leadership Program

Adobe has created a community educator program to bring teachers, counselors, and administrators together to communicate, collaborate, and connect with each other. I am a member



The Cost of Conferencing

Web Conferencing Tools	ACROBAT www.acrobat.com	ADOBE ACROBAT CONNECT PRO www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro
Web Application	Adobe ConnectNow	Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro
Maximum Participants	3	1,500
Features	Unique meeting room URL, screen sharing, VoIP and camera, chat pod, screen sharing, whiteboard, integrated audio choices, remote control, real-time polling, recordings, editable recordings, security, reporting, archiving, customization, break-out rooms, event management, content library, content sharing, content creation, track training and progress	Unique meeting room URL, screen sharing, VoIP and camera, chat pod, screen sharing, whiteboard, integrated audio choices, remote control, real-time polling, recordings, editable recordings, security, reporting, archiving, customization, break-out rooms, event management, content library, content sharing, content creation, track training and progress
Cost	Free	Initial set-up \$450, plus \$699 annual subscription fee for 5 named organizers (organizers can create/host unlimited meetings with up to 100 participants)
Add-ons	File sharing and storage, convert up to 5 files to PDF, Adobe Buzzword, online word processor	Adobe Presenter, a tool for creating on-demand Flash-based streaming presentations and quizzes using Microsoft PowerPoint, is sold as a package with Acrobat Pro Extended version 9 for roughly \$150/each (less under the school's CLP agreement); hosted access license (\$150/each), which allows authors to publish presentations directly to their Acrobat Connect Professional accounts
Adobe Exchange	No	Adobe Exchange allows meeting room content to be shared

of the Adobe Education Leadership program and have formed useful and meaningful relationships with educators from around the globe who share the latest technologies, showcase the work of students, and improve the global educational system.

Here are a few examples of how you can use Web conferencing at your school:

Foreign exchanges. Students in a Spanish class in the United States can connect with students in Latin America using Web conference tools, VoIP, and video. These classroom sessions can happen on a regular basis between schools thousands of miles apart.

Human resources. District officials can interview job candidates in the applicant's home state or country through

a Web conference. The meeting can be archived for later viewing by school boards or district staff.

Networking. Education experts in specific fields can communicate and collaborate, forming larger communities so they can solve problems from a larger collective consciousness.

Home-bound students. Teachers can assign work to students who are unable to attend class because of illness or injury. They can even take assessments online before they are able to return to school.

Reaching out. Education association boards can conduct meetings from their homes or offices. The associations can offer quarterly or regular meetings to their members via the Internet and provide online training opportunities through webinars.

District staff development. School districts can offer online training, such as ISTE webinars, to employees on site. The sessions can be recorded for staff who want more time to practice what they were taught.

The world is not getting smaller, but the ability to connect with others around the world is expanding as the Internet and Web-conferencing tools grow more robust and accessible.

Resources

Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional Free Trial: www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro/?promoid=BPDEA

Adobe Education Leadership Program: www.adobe.com/education/community/k12/leaders/profiles/

ISTE Webinars: www.iste.org/webinars



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